**Connecticut Center
for School Change**
System Success = Student Success

**Testimony to the Appropriations Committee**
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**February 18, 2009**

Senator Edith Prague, Representative Gail Hamm, Representative Peter Villano and members of the committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund.

My name is Andrew Lachman and I am the executive director of the Connecticut Center for School Change. The Center is a statewide, not-for-profit organization that supports instructional improvement and assists districts in closing achievement gaps. We do this through grants and technical assistance to school districts; through leadership development programs for superintendents, principals and parents; and through public policy research.

Research studies show a clear linkage between student achievement and family involvement. Students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, pass their classes and be promoted, have fewer discipline problems, and graduate and pursue higher education.

Therefore, the Center, in collaboration with the Commission on Children, created a 12-week leadership development program for parents, Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE). Parents SEE provides parents with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to partner with schools to improve education. Participants explore questions at the heart of leadership, change, partnering, and education policy including: What do effective schools look like? How do schools function? How and why do schools change? What is a parent's role in children's learning and school improvement? By the end of the course, parents have a toolkit that enables them to address public policy issues and engage as parents and civic leaders to improve schools for all children. As one parent explained, *"This course gave me insight into what parents need in order to be effective advocates for change."* The Parents SEE curriculum provides parents with the skills and understandings necessary for them to become leaders, change agents, and active participants in education policy development and governance at the school, district, and state levels. Graduates of the program are currently serving as leaders in local school parent organizations, on school leadership teams, and on community school boards.

This year, Parents SEE is being offered in Bloomfield, Danbury, East Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, Stamford and Waterbury. In other years, Parents SEE has been offered in Bridgeport, Hartford, Norwalk and Windsor. The local programs have been supported by grants from the Parent Trust Fund and by funding from foundations, corporations community organizations and businesses.

Like the Commission's nationally-known Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), Parents SEE is about building a civic infrastructure to improve student outcomes. Parents SEE and PLTI are developing social capital and strengthening democracy. In the same way that the federal stimulus legislation recognized the need to invest in our physical infrastructure – roads, bridges, school buildings – in this time of fiscal turmoil, now is the time to continue our investments as a state in the civic infrastructure of engaged citizens working in concert to improve our educational system.

At the Center for School Change, we focus on the district as the vehicle for instructional improvement. As we put it, "System Success = Student Success." Families are an essential part of the system, working hand in hand with administrators and teachers to ensure an effective and continuously improving educational environment by partnering in their children's education and by voting on local school budgets. The Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund play an essential role in supporting and enhancing the role of parents.

In conclusion, the Center for School Change urges you to reject the Governor's proposed elimination of the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund.